

SHIFTING GEARS

THE CHANGING MEANING OF WORK IN MASSACHUSETTS, 1920-1980

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

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INTERVIEWER: Martha Norkunas

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MN: Before I actually talk about the Heywood-Wakefield Co., I wonder if you could tell me how your family happened to come to Gardner.

HO: Well, that's many years ago. They came back, well, our family, my family especially, came from Finland in 1900 and six. And they moved, well, they lived in certain parts of the country and part of them came to Gardner and lived here the rest of their lives, see.

MN: What drew them to Gardner?

HO: Oh, I don't know. It's just one of those things. Most of the people who came across from Europe either moved one place and stayed there or they moved all across the country, see. It all depends on the individual, see. Lot of them had friends in Gardner and they more or less went to those friends, see. That's the way it worked out, more or less.

MN: Would this have been your parents?

HO: Hmm? That's my parents, yeah.

MN: Where they married when they came here?

HO: Uh, they got married in Gardner. Got married in Gardner.

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MN: So they came separately? I mean, in separate families?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah, but they knew each other over there, so they got married in Gardner.

MN: Oh, they did? And did your father or your mother work in any of the wood-working companies?

HO: My father worked in Heywood's for a short period of time. In the wood-working division.

MN: And then afterwards?

HO: Well, then he retired at 65, he lived until he was 84. I'm almost reaching that age myself, I'll be 83 this year.

MN: Wow. You know, it's so amazing to me because most, when people tell me their ages I would guess them ten years younger, usually.

HO: Well, you see, I worked for Heywood-Wakefield for 47 years. And I've been retired 15 years. So--

MN: So you--

HO: --I kind of forgot a lot of details.

MN: Oh, they come back, don't worry.

HO: You have to reminisce once in a while, and then go all the things, so.

MN: So you were born in Gardner, then?

HO: No, I was born across. I was six months old when I came over here. My parents got married in Gardner. And my mother got homesick and went over there and I was born there and came back (laughs), Kind of mixed up consideration, but that's one of those things.

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MN: So people did go back, I mean--

HO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, that was, people got homesick and they and they go home and they come back again. One of those things.

MN: And then, as you were growing up, were you involved with, it's Finn, Finnish, yes?

HO: No, no, no, no, never was involved with them.

MN: Didn't go to the Ash St. Hall, or--?

HO: No, no, no way, no. No, I'm really of Swedish descent. Born in, they used to call us Finn-Swede. There's no such a language as Finn-Swede. That's like anybody born in this country of Swedish descent, they're not American-Swede or Swedish American, I mean this is really a silly situation, but that's the way.

MN: Swedish was the language in your house?

HO: Oh, yes, oh, yes, oh, yes. Definitely.

MN: And there was a good Swedish community here.

HO: Oh, yeah, well, you take all of Pine st., was mostly, well, there's combination of Finnish and Swedish people on Pine St. And around this section there's quite a few. And of course, Laney St. had an awful lot of Swedish people.

MN: Did you have your own church?

HO: Hmm?

MN: Did you have a Swedish church?

HO: Well, they had a church down on Church St., That's where I used to, went to church, was on Church St. I was confirmed there, so forth, so on. Big deal. (laughs).

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MN: But did they have a club or anything for the Swedish people?

HO: Well, not too much in those days, you know. Course you were young in those days, they didn't have the things they have today, there's quite a difference. Today they have clubs and this and that. Those days they didn't have any clubs. Those were horse and buggy days.

MN: My mother tells me these stories.

HO: Oh, yeah. Did you have any relation that worked at Heywood's? Norbunas, is that your last name?

MN: Norkunas.

HO: Oh, Norkunas, I thought it was, where'd I get the B out of there.

MN: I don't know, uh.

HO: I probably didn't read it right. (laughs)

MN: And, no, or I probably misspelled it. Sometimes I notice I write my own name incorrectly. Oh, no, my family lived in Lowell and Lawrence. We were not the Gardner way.

HO: Oh, I see, I see.

MN: Uh, so this, this is my first experience with the wood-working community.

HO: Oh, there's quite a bit in wood-working, especially if you, like where I used to go to the lumber camps, where they used to cut down the logs, tree, put in the hot pond, wash off the dirt--

MN: In the hot pond?

HO: Hot pond. They wash the dirt off of the logs, see.

MN: Was it really hot?

HO: Well, it was, course, the temperature would vary, but it was,

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they call it a hot pond, believe it or not, then washed all the dirt off the logs, see, then they ran it into a saw mill, _____ (unintelligible) and cut it, they turned a log as you went along. In other words the sap is on the outside, they kept rotating the log, and then that way the, the core of the log was used for tie sides, see, they couldn't use it for furniture. Railroad ties, railroad ties.

MN: What did you call it? Tie Sides?

HO: Well, they called it tie sides, some of them. In other words, it could be used either for that or railroad ties, so that's about the way they would grade the lumber. Your sap would be on the outside and as you went along, it was less valued, so forth. And they had, they, based on the amounts of cuts they would get out of a board. All your knots had to be cut out, see, and they would--

MN: And this would be at the lumber yard?

HO: At the lumber yard, that's right. Then they'd ship the lumber to us and we'd put it in the yard, dry it, then we'd put it into dry kiln, dry it out a little more, see. And then it'd go to the cut off saws and they'd cut it the length, and then it'd go to rip saws and it'd rip all the defects out of it, see.

MN: And would those cut off saws and rip saws, were those?--

HO: Well, cut off was you cut the length, rip was you ripped the wood, you know what I mean? You know, like a chair for instance, here, you'd have all these pieces in here, see, and it'd rip it, first the length, then it'd rip it to the width of it, see. Then they'd glue it together, see. That's how you get a _____ (unintelligible). Then, of course, you do all your machining

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after that, see, all the, you do all your shaping, your sanding, and all that sort of stuff. And then you'd machine it, you'd have to put holes in here for your legs and so forth, see, that would be a way it worked through, see.

MN: And how would they know the setting to put the saws at?

HO: Well, they'd have a form, they'd cut, cut the blank, they'd cut a blank to a certain size, a chair would be a certain wood, a table would be a different wood, or, we'll say, a case goods like bureaus and so forth, these different lengths. They'd have all these different lengths, they'd know what length to cut it at, they'd know what width to cut it at, see.

MN: And would they have to look at that piece of wood and say, "OK, this wood, I can use this and this amount?" Would they have to exercise any judgement?

HO: Well, they'd have to use their judgement in, out of rip and cut. Cut you had, you had to know how to cut the proper length, see, so you get the most out of a board, see. That's the basis principle of the thing, see.

MN: So for that you need some experienced people.

HO: Oh, yeah. All the way through. Well, towards the tail-end, I used to check into the age bracket of alot of people, if they were in so many years, alot of these people won't be around. Then you got to break in new help. And that's where we had the problems. Breaking in new help. People worked three days, I don't like this job, so they'd quit, so that's what, why plants deteriorate. because nobody want to work. They want a lot of money, they don't want to do anything. That's the basis principle of the thing.

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MN: But it didn't use to be that way?

HO: Oh, no, no, no, no. Was our biggest problem all the way through was, we had too much floor space at Heywood's, we transferred a lot of stuff down to Newport, Tennessee. And, and of course, as we got out of a lot of these products, like baby carriages and all the other things I listed, you had too much floor space and not enough manufacturing space. See, so your overhead is terrific, see, that's what killed you, it's the fantastic overhead you have, see.

MN: You mean, you couldn't fill up that space with manufacturing?

HO: No, no. Well, when you transfer stuff out of Gardner to other plants, you get the same amount of floor space but less production, so your cost becomes excessive, see.

MN: Let me go back to how you got involved with working at Heywood-Wakefield, was it your first job?

HO: It was, yeah, when I got out of school, I went to Bentley School of Economy and Finance in Boston, I graduated in 1927 from there--

MN: Oh.

HO: --And I started working at Heywood's at that time, so I worked all my life at Heywood's and then retired in 1973, see.

MN: Did you expect to work at Heywood's after you went to Bentley?

HO: Well, no, as a matter of fact, that was during the depression years, remember, 1929 we had that big crash, 1927 was the start of that big crash. People couldn't buy a job, it was impossible to buy a job. People, they used to have an employment office that was right outside of the main office, and there was lines from

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there down to the square looking for a job, they couldn't give 'em jobs. This was the 29 depression and it started two years prior to that, see, so that was quite a thing.

MN: Did somebody speak for you at the company?

HO: Well, the, the office manager, we had so many bosses, takes time to go through 'em. The office manager was a graduate of the school I went to and that's how I happened to get in there, see. But it isn't only knowing somebody, you have to actually have the ability when you get in there to produce, otherwise, you're not there, 'cause he left there a few years later and we had several other office managers, see, so that was quite a change, see. But that's how I got in to there, see. You couldn't buy a job in Boston during those years.

MN: Had you tried to work somewhere besides Gardner?

HO: Well, not at that time, I was happy where I was. I enjoyed living, working and living around this section. It was, get to know a lot of people, you know, and, and during the war, you had chances of getting other jobs, but didn't, a lot of these companies only existed during the war, and after that, they, that was the end of them, so, you couldn't gamble on those situations. It's impossible.

MN: And was it unusual for someone to go to college like you did?

HO: In those days, you were lucky (laughs). You didn't have, there's no, you had to pay your own fare, you had to borrow money, because there's no scholarships in those days.

MN: Oh, and you commuted back and forth?

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HO: Oh, no, I lived in Boston, I couldn't afford to travel back and forth (laughs). I lived in Brookline during, during the time I went to school, Boston, and, 'course Brookline was a hard place to live because people wouldn't even bother talking to you, you was like a foreigner down there (laughs), they just didn't, didn't care about _____ (unintelligible) and so forth. If you got sick, you were just out of luck.

MN: Especially coming from a small community like Gardner.

HO: That's right. Course actually, back in years ago, we had 21,000, we only got 17,000 now. I don't know if it's grown since, with all these additions coming in, I suppose it'll be up the the 20 odd thousand.

MN: Yeah, I think it's somewhere around 19,000 now.

HO: Oh, it is? Yeah, it was down, well, was 21, dropped to 17, now it 19, probably 25,000 before we're through, who knows? One of those things.

MN: And what, what was your first position at Heywood's?

HO: Well, I had a, when I first got there, I was a, strictly a cost man. I was asked to go out and figure carriage line the first job I had. I didn't know a wheel from the back of a-- (laughs). It was terrible. And nobody would help you because in those days your executive office was in Boston, see, and, and you had plant managers here. And I forgot what year they moved, was in the 30's I believe when executive office moved to Gardner.

MN: And you started in '27, did you say?

HO: Well, actually, the latter part of '26. I worked a little

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before I graduated, so, it was the latter part of '26. But the executive office moved here, and, of course, then Mr. Greenwood's father ran the company and then when he passed away, Dick Greenwood took over, and then, of course, there's been a lot of changes since. John Heywood was the last one, and, a lot of the ones that I worked with have passed away, there's none of them living. Take the President, the Vice-President, the sales manager, there was a treasurer, and all the way down the line. None of them are living. Course some of them were five years older than I was. Some of them died at an early age. I think our sales manager was 65 when he died. Bone cancer.

MN: Oh, I was going to ask you if it was stress related.

HO: No, no, no. So there was a lot of changes, and, of course, during the depression they sold all their warehouses. They had to get rid of all their warehouses. I don't know if anybody mentioned that to you at any time.

MN: I noticed in the 1951, the 125th anniversary booklet, they talked about streamlining the company.

HO: Well, this, they got rid of it, that's how you streamline. (laughs). We had plants all over the country, we had it in Los Angeles, we had 'em in _____ Canada, we had 'em in, trying to think of them all now, we had 'em in Manamane, Michigan, and, of course, we had, the recent one was Newport, Tennessee. But then, all of that suddenly ended up with three. Manamane, Newport, and Gardner. Then we ended up with a big fat zero.

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(laughs). That's the way - deteriorations.

MN: So who, if you didn't know, really, what a carriage wheel was, who showed you how to time the operation?

MN: I had to go and work with the foreman out there. Cause I didn't know the operations, I didn't know the materials. I had to work with a foreman. And, that's the only way I could find out what it was all about. And I had to ask somebody the whole line. I was as green as they come. But I finally got through it, took a lot of work.

MN: Did you actually have to make it on the line with the people so you could see it, how it went?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

MN: Did they know who you were?

HO: Oh, well, they got to know me after a while, you know. But you wouldn't get any help from the superintendents because you had a conflict of interest between plant manager and factory, see, so you had to fight (laughs), like two battles. They finally transferred us from the main office into the factory. _____ (unintelligible). Then we started doing time study work. Course, we were cost people, so we had to learn time study.

MN: What's the difference between cost, what you first did, and time study?

HO: Well, cost is when you figure a product. Time study is when you time an operation. And set piece rates, see.

MN: Oh, so initially, what you were doing in the carriage department was cost?

HO: That's right, that's right.

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MN: Can you describe that, I mean, exactly what you looked for?

HO: Well, you had to measure, like for instance, those days you had cloth bodies on carriages, you had to go out a measure the amount of cotton, cloth that went into a carriage, see. Then you had to figure how it was cut. In other words, you had to cut it to side, to a pattern, see, Then on your metal work, your wheels, for instance, you had to make the rim, see. YOU'd cut it to, to a length, then you'd roll the rims, then you'd _____(unintelligible) the rims. You'd punch holes that, that, in the rim for the spokes, you had to know all those sequence of operations, see. Then when you come into the hob(??) you had certain blanking operations, that form the thing, and so forth, then you had to assemble that wheel, see, they'd put the spokes in a machine and it's go around like this and hammer it all the way down, around, so the form of the wheel, see. YOU had to learn all this, you couldn't do the line unless you knew all these operations. Somebody said, does it, I don't know, you had to learn all those things. Like, _____(unintelligible), the metal parts, you had to to know what type of steel you had to use, the operation that you had to perform to fabricate that particular thing, the assembly of that thing together, and the final assembly, the inspection, etc, packing, painting, and all that.

MN: How many people it took, and wouldn't you also for cost, figure out how long it took?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MN: Oh, but the difference is that you didn't pay the rates

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based on how long at that time--

HO: Well, it was--

MN: --but it was just to figure out the cost of the product.

HO: Well, actually, you estimated the time it would take to produce a certain piece. Then later on, when they accepted the carriage, you'd have, you'd, you'd go to the sales department, after you figured a complete line, you'd have all your costs ready. They'd add their selling and administrative to your costs, come out with a corporation cost and from that, they'd add a certain amount of profit. That was based on whatever the sales department, they, they should get, see. Based on competition, too, they couldn't exceed competition, otherwise, you couldn't sell 'em, see. So, therefore, we'd get, we'd have a sales meeting, and I would be the target, see. The sales manager would stand up there and say, how much does that cost? I'd have to get the answer like that. Supposing we change this wheel from this size to that size, how much is it going to cost? And I had to have the answer just like that, see.

MN: Oh, how--

HO: --then the salesmen would say, "Where you gonna pay that much?" Then you'd have them fighting with you, that argument pro and con, in other words. We can't afford to spend that much, then the sales manager, OK, course him and I had this planned together, how to raise this thing a little, so if he didn't want to put it in the line, I'd just add a little extra to the thing, when they say how much is this thing going to cost, I'd say, "Well, we can't afford this." This salesman, but he had the final

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say, see.

MN: But had you talked about it beforehand?

HO: OH, yeah, oh yeah. But then you get all these arguments and this, when you had your sales meeting, because they would critisize, you were on the firing line all the time, see.

MN: And would it ever be that one salesman would wan it, but the other one wouldn't?

HO: Oh, definitely, definitely. Everybody was different. They all had different personalities, different areas in which they had to sell, and their competition in that area was threatening them out, and naturally, they would argue. Pro and con.

MN: How would you decide who to go with?

HO: Well, that was entirely up to the sales man to decide. What he wanted. He would decide regardless of what the section, the sale --

MN: Oh, the sales manager?

HO: The sales manager would decide that, had the final say. That, that would be furniture, or, or it would be any article which we manufactured. He was the final say.

MN: And what were you saying before, that the plant manager would be antagonistic towards you? Like towards the whole operation?

HO: No, no, no, no, no, I, I, what I meant to say, is, is the, the factory, prior to the time the executive office moved to Gardner, you had plant managers, so on and so forth, and super-intendents, and the superintendents would never agree with the plant manager, had that-- (laughs).

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MN: But they were over, the superintendent was over the plant manager?

HO: Was supposed to be, but that, that didn't mean much, they could still argue pro and con, but when the executive office moved in, this was it, the way you would do it, there's no if's but's, or maybe's. 'course, they were top brass, naturally. They had the final say. But these are the things you have to go through, see.

MN: And so, I don't mean to seem dense, but, so in the beginning with this cost business, it seems to me that you're measuring how long it take someone to do something, also, from the very beginning.

HO: Oh, definitely.

MN: So I still don't see the difference between cost and time study.

HO: Well, cost is, you have two divisions. We had cost men and time study men.

MN: Even in the beginning?

HO: Yeah, well, at one time, I did both. Way back, see.

MN: Oh, so you always had this, as soon as you came on board, it wasn't like time study was a later deveopment.

HO: Oh, no, oh, no.

MN: Oh, you always had that?

HO: I went out, I used to go out to learn more about production and cost, I would go out and do time study work as well, and that way, I could follow the procedures in the plant and I could sit down, I knew where I was going. When I estimated costs, I knew what the time elements would be, follow me? Then when we branched

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out and we had more products, we had to bill a separate group of people for time study, who went out in the plant and did nothing but that. That was their duty, see? Is to study all these jobs and establish rates. Piece rates, see?

MN: Were they originally in piece rates, in the 1920's?

HO: I was trying to think back, yes, they were, they were. I used to set rates then, back, back then.

MN: And how would it be that some people were on piece rates and some were on hourly?

HO: Well, certain jobs, you couldn't set rates on. Impossible to set. Like for instance, if you're sweeping the floor, there's no incentive sweeping the floor, or when you're trucking, that's day work. All those jobs were day work, it's impossible to set rates on a job like that. Trucking back and forth, or handling stuff, you, it just isn't possible, see. When you set rates, it's the actual production of the article, the others have no relation to the article. So they're on day work, the ones that actually produce, but even those that produce in some cases, it would be impossible to establish any incentive on the work they're doing, see? So they were strictly day work, see.

MN: So is the whole point of the piece rate for incentive?

HO: Oh, yeah. You produce X number of piece and you got paid so much per piece. That's why they get piece rate. It's based on per piece. You do a hundred pieces, you got so much per piece, that's your earnings, see.

MN: But the idea behind that is that people will be lazy unless

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they're pushed a little.

HO: Well, you can't, you hit the nail on the head. You, you can't you can't gain any production on day work. It's impossible, you never get anything. A person on day work, your day rates are much lower than your earnings on piece work. Because they don't produce. They'd rather be on piece work on incentive. Some of those fellows could earn a lot, much faster than other people. And they figured by producing more, they should earn more. They do. It was more fair to them, see. So the more they produce, the more they earn. We had some fellows that were earning twice as much as other people. On the same identical job. Because they produced probably twice as much.

MN: And did the other guys know that these people were earning more?

HO: Yeah, that's their own fault, they weren't producing. If you don't produce, you can't get paid. Simple as that. We did have, we did have a bonus on the, on the paint conveyor. We had to set up a bonus. That was set up by Ernest _____ in Boston. After they dropped it on us, we had to take, take care of it at that time, see.

MN: That was set up by who, sorry?

HO: Ernst and Ernst. They were a accounting firm in Boston. They were a big accounting concern.

MN: And they were--

HO: They use to, they used to order out books at inventory time also. They set it up, and then, from then on we had to take care of it. All the changes, the difference in speed, bonus was based on

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production, too, and, of course, a lot of times, they had to slow the conveyer down and we had to adjust the bonus, see. Based on a reduction in speed. See. When they had different speed, the speed, that was on, because the wood shop, in some cases wouldn't produce enough units, so they could fill the conveyor, so they had to slow it down.

MN: And what's the difference between the bonus and piece rate?

HO: Well, bonus is a different set-up. It entirely, it's so many different factors and then piece work. It's a group of people working together.

MN: And they depend on each other.

HO: That's right. Where piece work is an individual, bonus is a group of people. They all have to contribute to the production of that conveyor, see. So, that's the difference. You couldn't set a piece rate on a conveyor, because it's a difference in speed, difference in manpower, and more or less of a group incentive, see. I hope that clears you up. (laughs)

MN: It does. I was just thinking, you have to put the group together carefully--

HO: Well, yeah--

MN: --if you had one person slugging behind.

HO: Well, a lot of it they had to keep up with the conveyor, but alot of stuff you did like, when you burn in, lot of stuff, they call burning in, when you have defects in the paint department, you burn in something. They got a, they burn this thing in, like if it's got a defect, they'll burn it in and cover it, see. Well, those people, you could, depending on how much you

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had, you had to vary the amount of people. But you paid the same bonus to everyone in that particular group. So, see. Even though you have to, have to, because it was based on the speed of the _____ (unintelligible), see. Probably it's confusing--

MN: Well, they couldn't work any, I mean, if they had two chairs and they finished them, they had to wait until another chair came up the conveyor.

HO: They were in that area all day long. So if you get an excessive amount, you had people, see. Follow me? But they'd still participate in the bonus, the same as the rest of the people.

MN: And when this company suggested you do the bonus, would you have to take their suggestions? Would you have to do what they said, the accountants?

HO: Well, they gave, they set up the program. See.

MN: They were sort of consultants?

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MN: They were sort of consultants, in a way?

HO: They actually came up here, studied the whole program, set up a bonus, based on speed, production. When they left we took over and took care of the bonus. We figured the bonus, the earnings and so forth, and any changes, we took care of the changes. In other words, they set the original, we took care of it after that. We handled the whole thing.

MN: And do you remember when that was, when they came?

HO: God, I don't know.

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MN: Before the war?

HO: No, this was after the war, when the conveyor was put in. I can't remember the exact year.

MN: Maybe the way for you to tell me about the changes in the company, is for you to tell me a little bit about the change that you, yourself, underwent from when you started. Like you started doing cost in the carriage department.

HO: I started in what we called the metal department, you see.

MN: Yeah, that would be good if you'd tell me again what you just told me when this thing ran out.

HO: And as an individual, more or less, in that division we had a separate cost man in the wood department. They had a separate one in the upholstery department, as they call 'em. That's where they used to make, well, they make baby carriages in the upholstery department. There's so many revisions during the period of year, and the departments moved from here to there. People worked, working would move to the various departments. They liquidated certain products which meant a complete change-over see, so that with so many changes going on over a period of years--

MN: How would that effect the workers, if you moved them?

HO: On seniority. Union contract. Seniority. In other words, if you had plant seniority you could bid off somebody else's job, if you wanted. Plant seniority, see. It became a complicated set-up, but that was part of the union contract. Was plant seniority.

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MN: Would people get upset if they had to move from their department to another one?

HO: Well, I don't, that's a matter if they want to accept it or be laid off. It was entirely up to them.

MN: So it wasn't, was it or wasn't it a big adjustment for them?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

MN: Cause some of these people worked, they told me they worked in the same department for years and years with the same people.

HO: Yeah, well, if you worked in the wood shop, that was more or less constant all these years, from way, way back. Wood wood,, wood work, actually they'd work, I should say, they'd work in the same department with the same people. Until they either retired, or whatever happened to them, see. But, like the metal division, eventually, that was entirely liquidated. Here, well, lot of part of, I forgot when it was, we only made wood furniture. Everything else was taken out, see. So, that's how everything shrunk to the point it was when they closed the plant.

MN: And tell me again, when this tape had run out, what they made in the metal department?

HO: What's that? , . .

MN: What they made in the metal department? When you first started?

HO: Well, they actually made doll carriages, they made baby carriages, I'm trying to think--

MN: Tubing? Not yet, huh?

HO: No, we had , tubing came in later on. We had a tube mill

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that made tubing. And, that, I've forgotten. It's hard to remember all the years that these changes were made.

MN: I actually saw it yesterday in the Shop News, I think it came in '47.

HO: Well, that sounds pretty much like like that's about the right time. We started making all the tubing because we were making screw furniture, and we required all the tubing to make the screw furniture. So we set up a tube mill and manufactured our own tubing, see. Then later on, this gets probably ahead of the game, but, later on, when we transferred, or we set up a plant in Newport, Tennessee, we manufactured all the tubing for them. Then finally, we transferred the tube mill to Tennessee so they made their own tubing. That's kind of vicious cycle.

MN: And what did they make in the Tennessee plant later?

HO: Screw furniture.

MN: Just screw furniture?

HO: Yeah. We used to make plastic seats and backs, too here, when we made screw furniture. That was why we transferred to Tennessee.

MN: And the plastics department went down there, too?

HO: Right, right, right.

MN: And do you know why they chose Tennessee as a location?

HO: That was the president's idea, Mr. Greenwood, he was the guy that decided to go down south. I, I assume from what, that what I knew, that the question is, is cheaper labor. Southern cheap labor. (laughs) Most of the plants that transferred

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down south one reason, cheap labor. Although they didn't produce as much as we did. Here in --but it was cheaper labor, so didn't, you didn't save that much cost, you know what I mean?

MN: Oh, that's int--, I never thought of that. So, big deal, they payed less per person but that person didn't produce as much.

HO: That's right, that's right.

MN: So you think it evened out?

HO: I question the transfer of the thing, but that's my personal opinion.(laughs)

MN: So then you went from the carriages, you studied the operation and then you costed them, and then, how were you accepted by the people, I mean, they were familiar already with cost people, workers, weren't they?

HO: Well, you know, when you're setting rates, you're not very popular. Nobody likes you. And there's always a question, too, of when you set new rates, they can always, you have the shop steward pounding on your door, "This rate is not right. We think it ought to be restudied." You get a grievance from the union and you either decide to, it was entirely up to me whether I wanted to restudy it or not. See, I was head of the cost department, time study, they would come to me and I would discuss it with the shop chairman, and would either say yes, or no.

MN: The shop chairman?

HO: Shop chairman.

MN: Would he have been a company employee or union?

HO: Union. He's a union. Union, you had your steward and your

to

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shop chairman, which was over the steward. He worked with the union, he was part of the union set-up, see. And he would check with us about grievance and so forth. As far as piece work grievances or any rates, it'd be up to us to decide whether we should restudy it or not. Some cases, we would agree, we would recheck it, other cases, we would say, well, this is it. Then they could still file a grievance.

MN: And then where would it go?

HO: Might go to arbitration.

MN: Oh, that would be the next step after you?

HO: Well, yeah, then I'd be called in, arbitrator would argue, pro and con. But he couldn't, the arbitrator couldn't adjust piece rates. It was up to me.

MN: He could only ask you.

HO: That's right. But any other grievances other than that, they could argue pro and con and then the arbitrator would decide so on, so on. And there was a lot of times, you wouldn't agree with them, but what could you do? He had the final say on some things but on rates? No. Didn't have anything to say.

MN: But wouldn't you have worked out kind of, some sort, I mean, you were in the company a long time, wouldn't you have worked out some sort of relationship with the people that you timed?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. A lot of them were very friendly. Others, just the opposite (laughs). That would depend on the individual. No, individuals were different, you know. Some you can talk to,

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others, you can't. There's a lot of times somebody would come to me and talk about a certain rate, I'd listen to them, and I'd say, well, I'll check it and I'd go back and review the thing if I thought they had a beef, I would say, yeah, I'll recheck it. I had a lot of kids who had no problems, but I would recheck it.

MN: Would there be, would for example, the superintendent or the foreman be sort of on your side?

HO: They didn't have the time to do it.

MN: Oh, it was just between you and the factory worker.

HO: We set the rates, that was our responsibility.

MN: And the foreman couldn't intervene?

HO: No. He might make suggestions, but basically, he kept away from it. He didn't want to get involved. (laughs) I don't, I don't blame the foreman for not getting involved, because they didn't establish the rates, we did, and it was our responsibility to correct it one way or the other. Wouldn't be up to the foreman to do it, even the superintendent. He might talk to you about it, give you his opinion, but the final say was ours. Decide what to do.

MN: And you were definitely part of management versus part of the factory?

HO: Oh, yeah, my responsibility was direct to the president. He's my boss, nobody else. He's the guy that put me on the job and I was responsible to him. We used to have two divisions, we had a wood division and a metal division. Was combined, and I was

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given the job of taking care of the whole shop. So that's what I did.

MN: Oh, the whole thing.

HO: Oh, yeah, the entire factory.

MN: But wouldn't people, too, someone told me, the people played sort of a game, you'd time them, they'd slow down, you'd realize they slowed down, you'd add a little bit. Mean it was a kind of funny little--

HO: Well, it all depends. We had some pretty good time study men that you couldn't fool. They knew what they were doing. And they timed enough jobs to know the efficiency of certain people. They got to know the people, too. Cause when you time the guy, it isn't what you're timing, it's the efficiency of the operator. You know whether this guy is giving you the business, playing an angle (laughs) _____ (unintelligible) he is not. You can tell. I could go out on the, I used to go around the factory checking a lot of things, and I'd watch a guy work after piece rate was issued. I'd just stand there and watch him, I wouldn't hide anywhere. I could tell whether a guy was laying down on the job or if he was producing where he should. You get used to these jobs. Spend years studying this thing, you know what a man can produce and what he can't produce. You can figure if he's laying down or not laying down. They try to fool you, You have to stand down and kind of grin at yourself, who's he kidding, anyway. (laughs).

MN: So you get to be a perceptive observer of people.

HO: Oh, we had some that were pretty tough. they'd tell you

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where to head, in plain language. (laughs) I don't know. I just didn't pay much attention.

MN: Oh, you wouldn't get upset?

HO: Well, when you first start on the job and people start jumping all over you, you do get a bit upset, but after a while you get used to it, doesn't bother you. It's like any job, you know what I mean? They rant and rave, you just grin a little, walk away and forget about it. (laughs).

MN: And I bet they tried to make deals, too.

HO: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That's human nature. How can I get a little extra, do it, certain conditions.

MN: But somebody else, someone else said he'd done a little time study, said he always had to be careful to give a good rate or he couldn't sleep at night. Once in while, he'd get home and think, I don't know if I did that right. And he'd go back the next day and check it to make sure.

HO: Well, that happens once in a while. Course, all the times when a time study man, they'd _____(unintelligible) conditions, he knew a guy, he didn't know a guy, you know you get into personalities, too. You have to watch there, the time study men, whether they know and if they don't, I'd say, well, we'll give them a little better rate than we gave the _____(unintelligible). That's personality, Can't get away from that. You don't know how much that occurs. You have no way of knowing. It's one of those things, human nature.

MN: Could you, would you be responsible for watching out that it didn't happen?

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HO: Well, you'd have to, if you found it out, you'd have to check with the individual that made the rate. You had no other recourse. But you couldn't check everybody. My God, there's millions of operations to that plant, it's impossible. You can see by that list, the stuff that we produced, is quite a list of items.

MN: Yeah. And you had a huge department for each one of these areas. Yeah. But... So after you moved from the metal department with the carriages, where did you go, then?

HO: Well, we moved, up in, we had a new department at a later date, at which we had, I don't know whether you heard. Frank Parrish, he was the head of the experiment, they called it the experimental department. And we worked for him and the entire factory, the cost men and wood shop and metal division, there was two of us, plus whatever helpers we had moved in his office, and he was our boss. Then he had designers that worked out all the details on all the products in the plants.

MN: Designing them?

HO: Designing it and so forth and from there we worked on all the costs on the various products like I had listed there. We worked for him. Then that was dissolved, dissolved later on and we set up cost department, which included time study and cost men and all the details involved and that's how it ended up more or less. Course, as, as the products went out of, out, we stop _____ (unintelligible), I should say, you reduce the amount of personnel in your department. See. You had to reduce the amount of personnel, you had to reduce the amount of

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cost men, reduce the amount of time study, and so forth.

MN: But then wouldn't you add new products later?

HO: Yeah, well, this was the tail end of it, before the, when they ended it was strictly furniture, not all these other products. We weren't in a lot of sch--, I mean, furniture products. We had ash products in scho--, in furniture, I should say. We had regular maple furniture, ash furniture, and even had pine furniture towards the end. So we had extended our wood line, we had hundreds of items in the wood line. That's, that's where we started off, so we ended up with nothing but wood furniture. All the other products had been taken off.

MN: That was later, after the war end.

HO: OH, that was the tail end of it. Back in, oh, I'd say, I'm trying to think about 1959 or 1960. That's about the point where we started getting rid of most of them.

MN: So you became a cost department, you're own department, before the war though?

HO: Well, I started off, to get back to the original, I started off in the main office, under a office manager. Then I went out in the plant, worked for a superintendent who was my boss where I did time study work and cost work and learned the product and the procedures. Then we moved up into the experimental where we worked under this certain party and who had all the products and we worked through that. Then we set up a cost department with time study and cost and handled all the stuff from there. We transferred (laughs) from one place

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to the other. It was a kind of a jumping around deal, see.

MN: Then you stayed there.

HO: We used to, we were up in the top of the building on Pine St. where we had the cost department combined. Then we'd go into the main office, that's where we were last on the first floor, the main office.

MN: Is that the flat iron building?

HO: That's the final, that's your main, your plant right on, well, you know where your main office is.

MN: On Central St.?

HO: Central St. We moved into the first floor of that. That's where we were. The purchasing department was in the front, we were the cost department, and the accounting department and payroll were on the other side of us, see. So it was kind of a combined set-up.

MN: So would you have to work in cooperation with the people who bought material and ---?

HO: Oh, definitely. Well, for instance, I used to _____
_____ (unintelligible) with the lumber buyer. And he bought all the lumber and decided what grades to buy. And also, he bought lumber from Canada, that was our main source was Canada. Plunkett-Webster was the outfit that sold lumber--

MN: Plunkett-Webster?

HO: Plunkett and Webster from New York. I think they were located in New Rochelle, New York, as I recall, trying to remember all these details, and they would send their salesmen with their prices to us. And we always, we would sit down,

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I would sit down with the lumber buyer and check the prices with him. Course he had the final say on what they would pay, but we had to know what prices to figure in our cost. Then we had to set up raw material books on every item, and as the bills came in we would record it in these books, you'd have, of course, all kinds of lumber, paints, all kinds of materials were recorded in the raw material books. And the top of the raw material sheet you'd have the standard cost, actual here. You'd have actual versus standard and you'd book the variance every month. You'd go through it. So all, invoice went directly to us, recorded by us, adjusted by us against the book, see.

MN: Against the sort of average of what it should be, that's the standard?

HO: So at inventory, I'm getting, probably a little ahead of me, at inventory time you'd price your inventory. We'd do a cost inventory. We would extend the inventory. Then the auditors would come from Boston to double check our figures, see, analyse the raw materials, they'd have to go to our raw material sheets to get the information, see. And then check. Was just a mom, mm, mm, just check on us to see what we were doing. And then they'd analyse the lumber waste and all that sort of stuff and, of course, the operation, they couldn't tell. They didn't know one from the other. Say this is it and they'd have to accept our figures. They didn't know the sequence of operation. You could tell them, this is it, they couldn't prove you wrong, it's impossible. But the only way you could analyse

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or find how close your standards were was when you took your physical inventory and compared it with your book. If they didn't jive, then you had problems, see. So, and then, of course, at inventory time, we used to take and give each foreman a mess of tags and they'd tag every item in the plant. Then we'd go, at first the auditors used to check. Go out and check the various piles, they'd comb, to double check what was on the tag. Then when they'd say to the foreman, well, we checked it, then he'd tear off and leave the stub on the thing, tear it off, then they'd come down to us. We'd have to sort those in numerical order and so forth, record it on inventory sheets, before we were able to cost the inventory, see.

MN: And this would happen every year?

HO: Oh, every year. Then you'd have to revise your standards every year because the cost of material increased every year. Your labor contracts changed every year, so you had to revise your whole standards.

MN: And if they, say the company wanted to change an operation, let's take for example, the introduction of the conveyor belt. Would they have consulted with you on the cost effectiveness of the conveyor belt?

HO: No, that would be, you take, the conveyor was entirely different from piece rates, they were set up, as I said, by Ernst and Ernst. They were the ones that's supposed to figure out the efficiency of the conveyor based on the old method.

Follow me?

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MN: Oh, did they do it every year, this Ernst and Ernst or they just were there as a one shot deal when they came in?

HO: Well, as far as the conveyor, they did a lot of study, months and months of study, before they even came up with a plan. Then they had to test the plan to see if it operated properly or not, see. There's a lot of detail work behind that, and we couldn't, as a department, we couldn't take the time to do all that and do our other work, it's impossible. That's who you had to have auditors from that particular, they were _____ (unintelligible) auditing concern. And they had some pretty, experts that's supposed to know all the details, see. It took real engineering to set that up. We went in there, then they had to compare it with the old method. They used to truck everything, they didn't have a conveyor, they used to truck things from place to place, you know what I mean? They used to finish it here, truck it over there, finish there, that was a lot of--

MN: Oh, little trucks that ran inside the plant?

HO: They had big trucks, flat trucks, like a chair that sticks on their truck, they'd spray it, then they'd move it around that particular department, then they'd have to move it to another department where they did other operation, painting and so forth, so on.

MN: How would they move it?

HO: Huh?

MN: How would they move it? On the truck?

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HO: Oh, yeah, they'd move the truck, unload it.

MN: That would be outside the plant, the truck, I mean--

HO: Well, no these, these were, isn't like a truck on a road or anything like. We call 'em trucks. And they were inside the plant. And you put stuff on 'em, see, and moved it, see. From department to department, see. And, of course, they had elevator, so if they wanted to go up to the top floor, they'd put all these chairs on this truck, they were all part, they had a form down below on here, they'd put it, chair along here, chair along here, push it out. They probably had twenty chairs on a, on a, we call it trucks, I don't know what you would call it.

MN: Long as I know what it is, it's all right. (laughs)

HO: And then put it from department to department.

MN: So people had to do a lot of lifting to put everything
On these trucks--

HO: Well, there was more trucking and handling than there was actual production. The idea of the conveyor was to increase production and reduce the amount of handling, see. That was the intent of the thing. But it was a complicated thing, it wasn't an easy thing to figure out. To go out engineering and checking and testing, and so forth. Even then when they got it going they ran into a lot of problems, they had to revise it, we had to revise it quite a number of times, 'cause it didn't work out right.

MN: How so? What kind of problems?

HO: Well, the reason is, people wasn't, were, pay they were getting

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was too low. Production wasn't wheré it should be, see. They had anticipated so much, they had exceeded what it should have been, see? Follow me? They thought they're going to get more production by the conveyor. Even though the conveyor was based, set up on a certain speed, you could only produce X number of units, see. They had hooks, see, they'd hook it on, see, and then the conveyor would run. And you had to space the stuff so far apart. In other words, you had a time element, if you had 'em spaced too closely, the thing wouldn't get finished. It goes through half finished, see. So we had a, they had a hook factor, in other words, you put a chair, you had one and a half hooks, see. You had something else, you had two hooks. Might have something that had three hooks, see.

MN: Oh, and would Ernst and Ernst have figured that, or you?

HO: They would, they set the thing up, so.

MN: Oh, so they figure, say a couch would take three hooks, you'd leave three hooks between the couch and then the small chair--

HO: That's right, right, right.

MN: Oh, let me ask you just one question about them. Did they come just this one time and set, I do these calculations on the conveyor, or they come back every year or every five years and suggest changes?

HO: Once they got it set up, that was it.

MN: Oh, so theirs was a one shot deal, that they came in and--

HO: Well, yeah, it was one shot, but it took months and months

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for that one shot.

MN: OK, but they didn't come every ten years and suggest, OK, you should computerize now, or you should do this?

HO: No, we handled that. We got used to their method and we, they showed us how they arrived at it. And then we took it over from there.

MN: And what, how did the workers respond to this conveyor belt? That must have been kind of interesting.

HO: It's so hard to tell their attitude towards it, they, it's hard. They probably didn't like the way it was running. Running too fast for 'em. Course everybody had an opinion.

MN: I wonder if it increased their stress, or they just got used to it or--

HO: That's (laughs), that's a hard thing to say.

MN: I mean, you couldn't sense that from your position?

HO: No, no.

MN: And were there, were there other big changes that came to the company in addition to the conveyor belt? 'Cause that was a pretty big one.

HO: Well, at one time (coughs), excuse me,

MN: If you get tired, please tell me.

HO: Uh, when Wakefield moved to Gardner, they closed Wakefield, all the, (coughs), excuse me, all the sch--, school, I'm getting ahead of myself, all the car seats and bus seats was transferred to Gardner. See. So the people, alot of people came from Wakefield and worked at Gardner. That's how, that was transferred to Gardner. Prior to that, we didn't manufacture, they manufactured at Wakefield,

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MN: So you had all those new people and new products, etc.

HO: That's right, that's right.

MN: That was before the days of the conveyor, wasn't it?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MN: And then later, there would be new kinds of machinery added, wouldn't there, as time went on?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah. We made springs. I didn't mention that then, we made springs for chairs before they had foam rubber you used to have springs in your cushions. We made coils, we made, assembled the entire spring unit. And that came from Wakefield, we didn't have that before, see.

MN: And with each thing that came, you would have to time it.

HO: Oh, yeah. Well, that's just an addition, additional cost and additional time setting. As a--

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HO: As you increased products, you increased the amount of detail. We even made cotton batting. We got the raw cotton, we had a cotton machine, made cotton batting. For regular furniture. We made the springs, we made the cotton batting.

MN: Did you always do that?

HO: Huh?

MN: Did you keep that up?

HO: Well, they, that was finally liquidated, I don't know, many years ago. And, we didn't think it was prosperous, you know.

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It was all right while we, well, actually when you got down to it, when they got away from springs, they got away from cotton, cotton was put on springs. So you went to your rubber cushions, that petered out. Was automatic, in other words, they didn't use it any more. So you got rid of your cotton batting and you got rid of your springs.

MN: And then, every time they changed an operation, you'd have to retime that--

HO: Oh, yeah.

MN: -- or maybe a new kind of chair, or change the styles. Didn't the styles change every year.

HO: I think I mentioned in there somewhere (rustle of paper) cost and estimated, cost of new products from samples or _____ (unintelligible) when patents were accepted by the sales departments, standard costs were set up based on the actual material used as well as the piece rates and effect. See? In other words, you'd either work from a drawing or a sample. In other words, they'd hand you a drawing, you'd have to sit down and figure out all the number tools and the labor just from a drawing.

MN: And you could figure out the label, the labor--

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MN: --during the war?

HO: Well, during the war, we produced all kinds of articles. Bomb boxes, we had radar units for Western Electric, and _____ (unintelligible), believe it or not, and bomb fuses, and, well I, that's just some of them. Now I would have

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go out on the road and estimate the cost of these new products which we never produced in our life.

MN: What do you mean, out on the road?

HO: Well, I, if Western Electric had a radar unit, I would have to go to Western Electric and look at it and go to a hotel and figure it out and give them a price.

MN: Oh, they wanted you to produce, let's say a radar unit, just like the ones that they were.

HO: They'd have, they'd have a sample of a unit, and you'd have to go wherever that unit was located, like we had a lot of work for Western, and they would have it in a certain place and you'd have to go down, down and look at the unit, figure out what it cost. Go back to the hotel, the same day, say, well, we're gonna charge you so much. That's all the time we had to figure it.

And you, and you never made one before. Now how would you do it?

MN: I was just gonna ask you that. (laughs) How would you know how much the material cost, how long it would take to make it?

HO: You had to sit and visualize things, was going to take so long, approximately, take so long to assemble, it's all visual. In other words, based on your past experience on metal, in my case, you had a general idea, general, and then when you get a certain figure, say, I don't know about this, I think I ought to double it. Say, I'm kind of leary. 'Cause all the contracts were fixed price. That's all you got. You lost your shirt, president would, you'd be out on the street. You had to gamble, and I was fortunate, I was lucky, I didn't bid too low, otherwise, we'd have lost. Now, on a fixed price contract, that's all you get. If you lost money, that was out of the company. If you made too much

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money, the government took it.

MN: Oh, this was just during the war?

HQ: Yeah, yeah.

MN: Well, that's a good deal for the government. (laughs). Kind of like with your taxes, if you don't pay, you pay interest. They don't give it to you, you don't get--

HO: That's right, it's a kind of a silly thing. And I went down, look at a tower, fifty foot tower, they wanted me to climb it, well, I, so I had to climb the tower and look it over with a lot of screens above, big nets with screens, I had to look at 'em and I had to go back to the hotel, come out with a figure, that evening, and I came, they looked at it. I started to, 'course there was a lot of estimating, might as well say guesstimating when you get down to it, and I said, well, geez, I don't know. Looks like about five thousand, but, I said, gee, I'm leary of this, I'll double it, ten thousand. You know what it cost to produce it? Eight thousand.

MN: Oh, gosh.

HO: So, one of those things. We had bomb fuses, we had to go to the Boston Ordnance in Boston with the federal people and there was so many parts on this fuse, no body ever saw them before. Even the government never made it.

MN: Oh, this was a new thing?

HO: A brand new fuse for the bombs. And most of the stuff had to be sub-contracted. In other words, people had to

_____ (unintelligible) certain parts we couldn't make.

We could do certian things, but a lot of the parts in there had

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to be, and we had to estimate that, estimate what somebody else would charge us for it, and it was still a fixed contract. We started producing, we had to hire a lot of people, alot of people.

MN: Mostly women, wasn't it?

HO: Yeah. Had an assembly line, drilling, all the way through.

We started producing and the first few months, we lost money.

The president got all on me and said, "Hugo, what's cooking?"

I said, "Don't get excited. Your starting _____

(unintelligible) always is the greatest until you start producting and putting incentive rates." We ended up making money, I

went back to him, I said, "What I tell you?" Course it could

have worked the reverse. "What I tell you?" I said, "Now we're making more money and we got to turn it back to the government."

But I says, "It could have been the opposite." Like I know a

certain man, we were riding home, this old man said to me, "You better make damn sure you're right." I would. It's, it's quite a gamble when you do those things.

MN: You also had to get, to design new machinery to make, the drills and--

HO: Oh, yeah. Well, actually, the machines were purchased by the government. You didn't buy the machine. You produced. But all your equipment, the government paid for. So if you had to figure that, you'd, been ridiculous even trying. Cause you had forms you had to make, you had machines you had to buy, and all this stuff, and it'd be impossible to work that out. So they, they paid for all the machinery and we, naturally, would pay for the materials

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and production, see. In other words, the cost of producing the particular article.

MN: And would women workers be different from men? I mean, would they be faster or slower or--?

HO: Well, I hate to tell you, but women would be faster on certain jobs than men. That's a fact. You take certain, you take things that are very small to handle. Men are, they're all thumbs. Women can do it that much faster. Actually, we had practically all women on our, on the machinery. They used to handle the drills, you know, and assemble the stuff.

MN: The fuses or afterwards?

HO: Hmm?

MN: Is that during the war, or afterwards?

HO: During the war, yeah. We had women welding, women welders. When we had these big radar units that we were assembling. They were big. Women did the welding. Lot of them were _____(unintelligible). During the war was a lot of women. They did men's jobs. And they did them much faster. And better than men. I hate to say that, but that's a fact. They were very, very efficient.

MN: Did you keep them on after the war ended?

HO: A lot of them retired after, although some of them did work later on, but... Course when the war work petered off, then you would go back to civilian production and, of course, you had regular people on that, see. I was going to say another thing, getting back, reminisce here, we used to make wooden

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baby carriages during the war. Made out of wood. This, you know where you have springs on a carriage, they were made out of wood.

MN: Wooden springs?

HO: Well, you call 'em wooden springs, yeah. Wood wheels. Because the government only allowed you so much metal, and so forth, so to overcome that, you had to design stuff that used more wood than metal. I just happened to think about, that was an interesting type of work.

MN: And they worked just as well?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. Like if you wanted something to bounce up and down, like you'd have the spring around here and you wanted to put the body on, they'd put, you'd have a thing in between like that out of metal, but the rest would be wood. Springs would be wood, the carr-, wheels would be wood. It's interesting. (laughs).

MN: That's funny. I'd like to see one of those.

HO: I don't know if they have one around, but that's a fact, they had wooden carriages.

MN: And aside from the war, did, were there sort of men's and women's jobs in the plants?

HO: Well, you don't, you never specify as a woman's job or a man's job. Never did. You know, they got, at one time, I forgot when, equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex, see. So if a woman did a man's job, she got paid the same rate as a man did. Prior to that, they used to have lower rates for women. I don't know why, but that was country wide.

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MN: Huh! The same job, but the women would get a little bit less?

HO: That's right. Ridiculous, but that's the way it was.

MN: But didn't it work out that there were mostly, I mean, departments where there were just women or almost just women, and departments where there were mostly men?

HO: Well, stitching, all women. In the stitching department when you made baby carriages, you had to stitch the linings of the body, there were all women stitchers. You didn't have any men stitchers. You had men that took care of the machines. But women did all the stitching, nothing but women in the stitching department. They would, if they had to fill the cushions, you'd have a woman fill in cushions, strictly women. That, I think, is where there was mostly all women. In that department. Was women. Course men couldn't stitch, anyway. Men would make a mess out of things. (laughs).

MN: And what about the burning in. Was that mostly women?

HO: All women. All women. There were some case where you might have a man, but basically were women burning in. And on the conveyor, that's on your conveyor, and stain wipers, used to spray stain and then they'd wipe it, get the stain off, you had mostly. Well, you had a combination, but you had women on that. And sanding on the conveyor was strictly all women.

MN: Oh. That'd be the small, hand sanding?

HO: No, they'd sand a chair, they'd sand a whole chair.

MN: By hand?

HO: Yeah, as it went by on the conveyor. They had certain parts,

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that's all you had to do, certain parts, you, when the conveyor was moving, you sanded. If you miss one, tough luck. (laughs)

MN: Oh, yeah, what could you do, right? Did you ever see that Lucille Ball, she's on the production line with the candy, and it starts going faster, so she puts all the candy in her mouth? I always think of that.

HO: Well, another, if they ran into problems, they'd run over and shut the conveyor down. See?

MN: But wouldn't they get into trouble?

HO: No, No, if you ran _____ (unintelligible) you could shut it down. But that, it doesn't mean if you didn't want to work you could press the button. You had the foreman do it. See. If you ran into a bottleneck.

MN: So the foreman had to always be right there on the floor, watching what was going on?

HO: Oh, yeah, definitely.

MN: But they must have played favorites, too, the foremen?

I mean, some people they liked--

HO: They were human, like everybody else. They were, a lot of foremen, they, when they hired people, course the personnel manager would get somebody and he would call the foreman down, he'd interview the guy, course they, in that case, you can say, "Well, I don't want him." Fact, personnel, the old saying, "It isn't what you know, it's who you know." That's a basis principle.

MN: Still true. And would they have time, the people on the floor, to talk to each other or, you know, some kind of social interaction while they were working?

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HO: I don't follow you on that one.

MN: Well, you know, like, if you and I were making baskets lets say, you're making yours and I'm making mine, we could sit there and talk to each other while we were making it. But if I was trying to write an article, you shouldn't talk to me because I needed to concentrate to do this. So certain jobs you can sort of visit with your neighbor while you do them, but other jobs, you just can't, you shouldn't really talk to the person next to you.

HO: Well, actually most of them did. Like if you, if you're working on the conveyor and a group of women were working on it, while they're working they can talk back and forth.

Nothing prevents that.

MN: Oh.

HO: If, if you were stitching the arm, machine here, over here, well, you could visit, talk at the same time. That, you don't prevent those things from occuring.

MN: Oh, I was just curious--

HO: I see people on piece work, they get paid by the pieces they produce, they could just get off the job, go and have a lunch or something like that, that's it. Course you had lunch period, and you're not supposed to, but that never worked out. All the time people would say, "Well, there's a sewing machine down here, " or something, "I'll go down and have a soda." You can't prevent a lot of that, you can talk about it, but you can't prevent those things.

MN: Oh, so they decided they needed a break, that was it.

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HO: That's right.

MN: And can you tell me a little bit about this whole business of the unions? How they first came in or why they first came in?

HO: Well, that goes back many, many years. The reason is unions always were established when people were unhappy about the pays they were getting. Then you start with a union. Then you have a vote, whether they want a union or not, see. You vote a union, and, then, of course, you have your, then they pick up their, once they get a union in, then you get into grievances, all that sort of stuff. Certain pays on certain jobs. Like we set up job evaluation years ago. It was set up again by the audit, Ernst and Ernst, auditing. We evaluated every job in the plant by a point rating and based on that point rating on a chart we would say it was so much, it was worth so much per hour, see.

MN: Even if it was a piece work job?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. So it ended up with, we called it base rate. And that base rate you added the amount of effort to establish a piece rate. Based on your time study, see. Those, all days, all jobs were based on job evaluation, evaluation of a job. And there was a lot of point factors, I can't remember them all, working conditions, the amount required, experience required to do that particular job. There was a whole mess of things, I can't remember all the time, all those factors were added up by point ratings and you got a grand total. That grand total based on a certain chart that they set up would pay

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a certain amount of money, see? That's the way it was set up.

MN: So your base rate, assuming you produced fifty spokes an hour, then your base rate might be \$2.00 an hour, and if you produced a hundred, you would get an extra dollar?

HO: NO, no, no, that's not the way it worked. Base rate was based on a requirements to do a particular job. The incentive is entirely different than that, see. The incentive is the production you have.

MN: So base rate wouldn't take into account how many you produced an hour?

HO: No, that would be an hourly rate. That had nothing to do with your piece rate. Piece rate was based on productivity, see.

MN: Oh, so base rate was more based on working conditions?

HO: Well, experience, working conditions, and so forth. The time it took you to do a particular job. In other words, did it require you one year to do it, six months to do it, whatever. You were allowed so many points, see.

MN: Now, suppose you work in the bending room where it's really, really hot and steamy.

HO: Your working conditions would be higher than any other place in the plant, see? That's all you hired, a higher base rate because supposing I worked in the stitching room. The conditions would be ideal. Work in the bend room, you'd have all that heat, and it'd be hot all the time, unbearable, your working conditions would jump way up here, see? So your point rating

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would be higher, see. It's based on your working conditions, the experience on your job, see, how long it takes to learn a job. Some jobs you could probably learn a couple hours. Some jobs would take you months, probably a year to learn.

MN: And would you make a difference between skilled and unskilled workers?

HO: Well, your skill, your unskilled would be mostly your truckers and handlers and things like that would be unskilled. Your skilled would be operators on a particular machine, or we'll say, like assembly or so forth. That's not on a machine, but that is skill, you had to require a skill to do these certain jobs. But the other, the unskilled job, like handling, trucking, sweeping, and etc., all those, unskilled jobs. Where your rates would be considerably lower, anybody could do those so you didn't require a knowledge or skill so you'd be rated that much lower.

MN: And would you determine the points for the working conditions, etc.?

HO: See, once they set it up, they turn it over to us, so any new jobs or any new changes of jobs, we'd have to adjust schedule. Now, for instance, some job changed, the methods changed, the working conditions changed, we would have to rewrite that job and come up with a new rate. Confusing. (laughs).

MN: No, but it's interesting because I visited S. Bents and I went into the bending room and it was hot!

HO: Course it is.

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MN: --and I thought...

HO: I don't know how they work down there, cause actually I think the guy that was superintendent down there, used to work for me, _____ (name, unintelligible), I don't whether you--

MN: I didn't met him.

HO: Well, he, as far as I know, he's superintendent, he used to work for me, he was a time study man that worked for me for quite a few years. And, I forget where he transferred to, and then, eventually, this last job... And, of course, he's got the background now that being superintendent, he knows, he worked in the wood shop, I had him do all the time study in the wood shop so he's well qualified to know what's going on, see. He knows the operation, see. Based on the experience he had with us, see.

MN: Yeah, that makes sense. But, you know, other things stuck me, and I wonder if these would be factors. What about, now, maybe it didn't matter to them, but some of the jobs seemed very monotonous. Would that be a factor in the conditions?

HO: No, no, no. You can't get into too many angles, you got certain basic rules and standards. There's a lot of jobs that are monotonous, but they pay good money. (laughs). There's a lot of jobs that are monotonous don't pay good money. But you can't deviate and say, well, this guy, you ought to pay him more besides what he's getting and he's making a good pay. See? You can't deviate, you got certain standards you got to work by, you can't deviate from those standards.

MN: So you try to take into account physical conditions but not

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psychological conditions.

HO: Well, that's part of your set up too, is your physical conditions, experience, I forget, there's a few other facts that I can't think of at the present time. But all those things enter, physical is one of them, too. Like a guy that does a lot of lifting. Physical, he gets more points than the guy that doesn't.

MN: And would the stain wiper get more points 'cause it's a dirty job?

HO: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MN: Someone told me that was considered, really, one of the lowest jobs and people would try to get off of that as soon as they could.

HO: It isn't, isn't the pay they get, it's the job is dirty. When I was a kid, I used to work down here at one of the plants down here and I used to work on stain. Took me months and months to get it out of my, my hands were brown, well, I don't know, months. Until I got off the job that I finally got it out of my system. It's a dirty job. Filthy job.

MN: And would the stainers try to, they would change? I mean, you wouldn't keep a stainer for years, would you?

HO: Well, a lot of, a lot of them stayed on for a long time, and others, all depends on how they felt. It's a personality angle. More than anything else. If a guy doesn't like it, well, he'd say he'd rather do something else.

MN: Would they ever have sort of meetings, during working hours? You would have to figure into the cost, to boost morale or, I

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don't know, talk about problems.

HO: That would be all personal problems, wouldn't have anything to do with us.

MN: But they didn't have that, that didn't happen.

HO: Cause if they didn't like anything, they would naturally go to your foreman, from foreman to the superintendent, they'd probably talk to the foreman, if he couldn't get any satisfaction, then go to the superintendent. All personal problems would be handled directly through your foreman or superintendent. They had any gripes, they would do that. Lot of times people would have gripes, instead of going to the shop chairman, who was head of the stewards or union, they'd go to the foreman, the foreman might contact us. Instead of going directly to the, and it all depends upon the individual. A lot of people in the plant would talk directly to me without going to the shop chairman.

MN: But they wouldn't have any organized meetings. Wasn't that in a way, and I'm going to get back to the unions in a minute. But wasn't that, in a way, one of the purposes of the social club? To try to build morale or company spirit?

HO: Well, it was... They try to set up the social club, more or less, to get away from union. (laughs).

MN: Of course, why didn't I think of that?

HO: So that was the basic principle of the thing, more or less, is if you get the people to be happy without a union, you're better off. Look at Simplex, they don't have a union. They try to vote it in quite a number of times and never got it in. But the company has to

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give leeway to alot of things that they normally wouldn't to prevent it from getting in the, the plant.

MN: What's so bad about having one?

HO: All depends on your stewards. You can have, I had, I don't know, I worked with so many shop chairmen that some of the, well, I knew them really well anyway. As a matter of fact, one of them, St. Jean, he's the president of the City Council, he was the steward for a while. I, him and I got together just like that, no problem. Then you had others that - pretty tough. But most of them, I'd say, you could get along with.

MN: And what about that newspaper, the Shop News?

HO: Well, it, I thought that was a wonderful thing. Was very nice, very nice.

MN: But that was part of the whole idea, too, to--

HO: Well, that was the same thing, too, as social club, basically. Your honor roll was more or less the same thing. To keep away from getting involved so much. We had some wonderful honor roll meeetings, corn roasts and all that sort of thing, it was wonderful. Get-together. That petered out after, I forget, when the union got kind of tough, I forgot what year, 1950 sometime. That was kind of, I guess the president decided, well, guess we better give up some of these social functions, I guess.

MN: As a punishment?

HO: I don't know, probably was. (laughs) Probably was.

MN: Cause I was reading the president's message and he talked to the employees as though, almost as though they're his children. You know, he sort of gives his opinion, he encourages productivity,

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he, and, and, and tries to make them feel, not only loyal to the company, but loyal to him personally.

HO: Well, that went well until, I say, the time there was a strike that kind of, I forgot what year that was, when, I guess things went sour between the employees and the president. Was during that strike.

MN: In the 50's?

HO: I forgot, must have been in the 50's. I can't remember the year, but must have been in that vicinity. But the feeling kind of soured. I think that's when they decided to move to Tennessee, go south with a lot of stuff, was during that period.

MN: Oh, maybe as an experiment to see if they could move everything down there?

HO: I don't know whether that was the point, but that was somebody's theory, I understand, I can't prove it or not.

(Telephone rings).

MN: Do you have to get that?

HO: No, my wife's in there. No, that's --

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MN: Again, you know, you tell me if you get tired.

HO: Well, about five more minutes, OK?

MN: All right, OK. And you know what? Maybe another day if you have time I could come back--

HO: Well, see, I have a problem. We go to the nursing home, I got a sister-in-law in the nursing home, we go twice a week

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there, I got the power-of-attorney, I have to take care of all of her affairs. Incapacitated, because she can't do it. Then by the time you have to take care of all of the affairs around here, shopping, etc, and all that sort of stuff, you don't have any time to yourself. That's why it's so hard for me to even plan anything, and when you got power-of-attorney, you got to take care of all the legal matters, you gotta cash all the checks, you gotta take care of all th Medicare and all that stuff, and it's, it ties you down so you just don't have any time. Now, I haven't even cut my grass for weeks, and you can't get anybody to cut your grass, then I got some painting to do, I haven't even got around to that. I just have to let things go. You can't hire people.

MN: Maybe I'll cut your grass for you, how's that? (laughs)

HO: You're tied down to the point that, there's very little you can... I'm more _____(unintelligible) now, when I worked, I accomplished more at home than now. In other words, you can't go on vacation, you're tied down, you just can't do anything.

MN: You have grandchildren in the area?

HO: No, I don't. We have nieces and nephews around. See, I don't have any children myself. We have nieces and nephews and, 'course, my mother lived here for a while, my father died, so forth and so on, so, we always had somebody in the house, but now people have gone, things have shrunk. Kids have got married, nieces and nephews have got married, so forth. So-- But being power-of-attorney have alot of problems, especially getting

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people in her nursing home, we go through an awful lot of detail. Awful. Just sitting there, times you go up there, you come back, you feel like -- it's the worse thing in the world. I spent about seven years. My mother's in nursing home for about four years, she's been nursing home for three years, alot of time devoted just to take--

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MN: The for-, who was in the foremen's association? Was a forman?

HO: Well, it was the foreman, the superintendent, and people in the main office, certain group in the main office, I can't, there's quite a few in the main office, outside of the president, the officers, like I belonged to it and the people that worked for me belonged to it, the men, not the women, of course.

MN: There weren't any women foremen anyway, were there?

HO: Nope. Was all a man affair. We used to have meetings at various places.

MN: And it was kind of like a little union, wasn't it?

HO: What's that?

MN: It was kind of like a little union, wasn't it?

HO: Well, it wasn't a union, more or less a get together and meetings, we'd have them in certain places, you know. The different, we had some at the Old Mill and so forth, then we'd have, well, I was trying to think of some of 'em. Up in Winchindon, there was a place we had two, various places, various--.

MN: Let me just ask you, I have two quick ones, I promise

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I'll stop right then. I just read in the Shop News, it was around '47, before that, they used to have all these parties, retirement parties, showers, all this, and they'd always take pictures and put them in the Shop News, and then this was the president's message, and he said, as far as, I'm only up to '47 in reading the Shop News. He said, "This is going to stop, no more parties in the plant. Has to be off hours."

HO: Well, that was during the Christmas holidays, when they used to drink, (Laughs), bring booze into the place, and, and get kind of rowdy. Well, of course, machinery around like that, you're liable to get hurt, so, they used to have parties like that. That's the only thing I can think about, is they had parties in the plant, they overdid it, see.

MN: You remember retirement, when people had little birthday cakes when it was their birthday, or little retirement parties?

HO: Oh, they might have had it in the shop, but, different, all depends upon what department it was in. They probably had that. I don't recall, 'cause we never got involved in that. That just was strictly out in the plant.

MN: Oh, cause you would be up in the offices.

HO: That's right.

MN: OK.

HO: We'd be away from the good times.

MN: (laughs) And just the last thing, I promise. On this, is there anything that you would want to say about this whole process of the unions coming in?

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HO: No, I don't think I'd care to comment on that.

MN: It's still a sensitive issue. I mean, it's still something that I feel that people will have trouble talking about.

HO: Well, you don't get involved in, in unions and so forth. That was strictly management problems, you know what I mean? We worked with the union, but as far as getting along with them and so forth, I was company arbitrator one time over a certain period. I would have to work with the union officials. But it was always a friendly get-together, didn't mean anything. As far as what the union represented, how the company felt about it, that was up to the executive branch.

MN: And were you part of the decisions they would make, or...

HO: No, I--the only thing we handled during the negotiation between the union, I might be called and they'd say what they planned to do. And get my opinion of what I thought. Doesn't mean that they'd do it my way. Cause actually, they, they, since we figured cost, we would have to know what the program was. It was necessary to know, so we would be called in and they would tell us what they planned to offer the union. And ask us what affect it would have on our cost. That's the basic principle. You have to know that. Then they'd come along, make changes, get caught between the squeeze, that's all. But we didn't anticipate they'd do this, but they did it. So we had to make other revisions. But that was more or less the idea of the thing, to get your opinion in regards to what

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they planned to do. 'Course, they did whatever they wanted to, regardless of your opinion. But you had to express your opinion regardless of the cost. 'Cause you're responsible to them as far as production and cost.

MN: And, oh, although w I promised you that was my last question, I just have one more. Did the company change quite a bit after Dick Greenwood left?

HO: Well, it's hard to say. When he left, of course, John Heywood took over. John Heywood took over the operation. 'Course business at that time, regardless of whether Dick was there or not, 'cause I used to call him Dick, thought I was kind of forward, but that's the way I'd known him all my life, actually, when you get down to it.

MN: Oh, you did?

HO: Well, yeah, when he came here I got to know him real well. And he would call me up every so often and we'd discuss things and so forth. I would walk into this office, "Hello, Dick." Everybody would look at me, say, "Mr. Greenwood."

MN: Because they always called him Mr. Greenwood?

HO: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. No, I think the change, the actual change was the fact that their product, as it was designed and accepted by your sales department, wasn't equal to competitions. And that has nothing to do with either party, but that's the way it did. You had new salesmen and new sales managers come in with different ideas and alot of times, concerned businesses based on what the sales manager decides to accept and sell.

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If you don't have the right product and right competition, you just, you lose business. I think about that time, I think that's what happened. And not only that, but furniture sales all over the country took a dose dive. So did ours, probably more than others.

MN: In the '70's?

HO: People weren't buying. I don't think, business wasn't as good, there was a lot of unemployment back, years ago, too. People couldn't afford to pay the price. We had quality furniture but we also had quality price. This here is one of the chairs that we made. That's my 47th year chair. We had the best quality of furniture, I think on the market. But our prices were too high based on competition. So people would rather buy an inferior product and pay less than pay a good price and have good product. Simple as that.

MN: And that was one of the reasons for the company going under.

HO: That and the transfer from here to Newport. If you had left that here, you'd have had that much productivity, less overhead, more competitive. That wasn't entirely the reason, but it helped, let's put it that way. You had a million square feet of floor space up there, and you utilized, probably, 50% of it, and you know what that is. It's like a store that has all storage and no sales. Simple as that. That's good accounting practice. Maximum amount of productive space, minimum amount of storage equals profit. Simple.

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MN: Yeah. Sounds good. It was sad because people always talk about it now being so, feeling so blue that the company folded.

HO: Well, we drive by it, it's, it's like the pit of your stomach dropping down, you say, "Oh boy, look at what we used to have." We had twelve hundred people working during the war. Twelve hundred. Last, I think they were down to three, four hundred towards the tail end. There's your answer, right there. You got to have manpower, you got to have productivity, you got a lot of operating space. You can't run a warehouse. That's what they were doing, was running a warehouse. You don't run a warehouse at a profit.

MN: Yeah, that's true. And it's funny how people felt it was a personal loss, not just, oh well, the company closed, too bad, but it's a personal--

HO: Oh, yeah. A lot of people feel sad about it. I hate to drive by it myself, I try to go through the square and get around it. (laughs) Yeah. Well.

MN: OK.

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